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COLOMBIA

SUCCESS STORY

Colombian Specialty Coffee: Triumph in 2006 Cup of Excellence®

What's So Special About Pitalito, Colombia? Four Cup of Excellence® Winners Call It Home!

"I feel great joy at having obtained this victory. I didn't expect it."

Luis Alberto Jojoa



Photo: ACDI/VOCA Colombia

Luis Alberto Jojoa and family Celebrate their Cup of Excellence® Win at their farm, "La Perla del Otún, Pitalito, Huila, Colombia

A jury of 24 experts recently awarded top honors to Colombian growers in an international coffee competition. The Cup of Excellence®, the most coveted award in coffee, recognizes only the very best coffees grown each year. This year the jurors sampled more than 600 entries, finally selecting only 23 lots.

Winners received the prestigious Cup of Excellence®, and their coffee was sold to the highest bidders in an internet auction. Some of these coffees commanded as much as \$19 (USD) per pound. The Cup of Excellence® program links farmers, high-end specialty coffee buyers, and consumers who are coffee connoisseurs.

Participating roasters and importers associate "quality" with the Colombia Specialty Coffee Program.

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For instance, of the 23 lots selected as finalists in this year's competition, five of the winners are participants in this program.

Grand Prize Winner Luis Alberto Jojoa scored 91.48/100 points. His farm "La Perla del Otún," is in the municipality of Pitalito, Huila. Seventh-place winner German Cavedes Cruz hails from another small municipality in Colombia. Other winners Helio Francisco Rico, José Nolby Rodríguez Quiroga, and Jairo Sandoval, are all from Pitalito!

The Colombia Specialty Coffee Program contributes directly to the quality improvements made by beneficiaries. It provides investment funding for their production, and processing or coffee drying equipment. The program also provides training in quality-enhancing post-harvest practices. Finally, training covers coffee "cupping," a practice by which producers assess quality *before* they market their products.

Grand Prize winner Jojoa, an associate of the COMAGRO Cooperative, couldn't be happier. The 36 year-old husband, and father of four, has come a long way. Growing up poor, he only attended school through the second grade. Ten years ago he was a landless farmer. He says with amazement, "I worked for years as a 'patiero', working on the patios of other coffee farms."

Mr. Jojoa is living proof that great things often come from humble beginnings. By working hard and gradually building up his savings, he was able to buy two hectares (almost 5 acres). He cultivates coffee on one and a half hectares. He attributes his achievement to three things: his fertile land, hard work and dedication, and the support of others, beginning with his wife and children.

The Coffee Growers' Committee of Huila supplied him with a dryer, and the USAID/Colombia-sponsored Specialty Coffee Program, managed by ACDI/VOCA, coached him in coffee processing and other post-harvest techniques.

All the winning farmers in this year's competition are exhilarated Mr. Jojoa sums it up this way: "I feel great joy at having obtained this victory. I didn't expect it."